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Agenda item 21 (a)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Italy, Japan, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America: draft resolution

Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international urban search and rescue assistance

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, which contains in its annex the guiding principles for strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations system, and its resolutions 54/233 of 22 December 1999, 55/163 of 14 December 2000, 56/103 of 14 December 2001 and 56/195 of 21 December 2001, and recalling agreed conclusions 1998/1 and 1999/1 of the Economic and Social Council and its resolution 2002/32 of 26 July 2002,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development,[1]

Deeply concerned by the increasing number and scale of disasters, resulting in massive losses of life and property worldwide, as well as in long-term consequences, especially severe for developing countries,

[1] A/57/578.

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Reaffirming that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In this context, humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country,

Reaffirming also that each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory,

Recognizing the importance of the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality for the provision of humanitarian assistance,

Emphasizing the responsibility of all States to undertake disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts in order to minimize the impact of disasters,

Noting the critical role played by local rescuers in natural disaster response as well as existing in-country capacities,

Emphasizing the importance of timely, coordinated and technically sound international assistance provided in close coordination with the receiving State, in particular in the field of urban search and rescue following earthquakes and other events resulting in structural collapse,

Noting with appreciation, in this respect, the important contribution made by international urban search and rescue teams in the aftermath of disasters, which helped to reduce loss of life and human suffering,

Commending the work of the United Nations Disaster Assistance and Coordination teams in facilitating rapid need assessments and assisting Member States to organize the on-site coordination of international urban search and rescue operations,

Concerned about the procedural requirements applicable to movement of foreign nationals and equipment to and within a country that may impinge on the timely acceptance, deployment to the disaster site, and activities of international urban search and rescue teams,

Also concerned that an additional burden may be placed on the resources of the affected countries by those international urban search and rescue teams which are inadequately trained or equipped,

Noting the efforts made by Member States, facilitated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of international urban search and rescue assistance,

Noting also that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is identifying the current state of international law relating to disaster response for a report to be presented to States and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2003, and emphasizing the need for intergovernmental oversight of this process, particularly with regard to its principles, scope and objectives,

Recognizing, in this regard, the Guidelines developed by the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, as a flexible and helpful reference tool for disaster preparedness and response efforts,

1. *Stresses* the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of international urban search and rescue assistance, with the aim of contributing towards saving more human lives;

2. *Encourages* efforts aiming at the strengthening of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group and its regional groups, particularly through the participation in its activities of representatives from a larger number of countries;

3. *Urges* all States, consistent with their applicable measures relating to public safety and national security, to simplify or reduce, as appropriate, the customs and administrative procedures related to the entry, transit, stay and exit of international urban search and rescue teams and their equipment and materials, taking into account the Guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, particularly concerning visas for the rescuers and the quarantining of their animals, utilization of air space and the import of search and rescue and technical communications equipment necessary drugs and other relevant materials;

4. *Also urges* all States to undertake measures to ensure the safety and security of international urban search and rescue teams operating in their territory;

5. *Further urges* all States that have the capacity to provide international urban search and rescue assistance to take the necessary measures to ensure that international urban search and rescue teams under their responsibility are deployed and operate in accordance with internationally developed standards as specified in the Guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, particularly concerning timely deployment, self-sufficiency, training, operating procedures and equipment, and cultural awareness;

6. *Reaffirms* the leadership role of the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator in supporting the authorities of the affected State, upon their request, in coordinating multilateral assistance in the aftermath of disasters;

7. *Encourages* the strengthening of cooperation among States at the regional and subregional levels in the field of disaster preparedness and response with particular respect to capacity-building at all levels;

8. *Also encourages* Member States, with the facilitation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and in cooperation with the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, to continue efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of international urban search and rescue assistance, including the further development of common standards;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, a comprehensive, updated report with recommendations on progress in the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of international urban search and rescue assistance, taking into account the extent of utilization of the Guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group.